Who Built Qal'at al-Ṣubayba?

Ronnie Ellenblum

"This is the finest ruined castle I have seen in the country."
H. H. Kitchener[1]

On the southern slopes of Mount Hermon, on a ridge extending from north to south in a deep gorge (see map, Fig. 1), stands the castle known in medieval times as Qal'at al-Ṣubayba (in the Latin sources: Subeba, Subeiba, and l'Assebebe; today it is known as Qal'at Nimrūd). The castle (Fig. 2), which is the largest and most perfectly preserved of all the medieval fortresses in Palestine, has been the subject of several studies.[2] However, several historical questions connected with the site remain unanswered. The present study[3] concentrates on two main questions: who originally constructed the fort, and during which periods were the main additions made to the original structure, giving it its present appearance?

The Construction of the Castle: Existing Opinions

Most scholars agree on the question of when the fort was originally built, ascribing its construction to the Crusaders during one of the two periods when the town of Banias was occupied by them (i.e., 1129–32 or 1139–64), with preference being given to the first period.[4] Grabois, however, is inclined to place the completion of its construction in the second period.[5] Benvenisti, who was the first to express doubts[6] as to whether the fort was built during the Frankish occupation, places its date of construction at the end of the reign of Nūr al-Dīn b. Zangī (during the 1160s), or at the beginning of the reign of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn.[7]

But of all the medieval sources relied upon in all these studies, only two can be seen to refer to the existence of the fort already during the Frankish reign. One is the Muslim geographer and historian Ibn Shaddād (d. 1285)[8] and the other is the Frankish jurist Jean d'Ibelin (fl. 1260s).[9]

[2]E. Robinson and E. Smith, *Later Biblical Researches*, I (Boston, 1857), 402–4; V. Guérin, *Description géographique, historique, et archéologique de la Palestine*, Galilée, II (Paris, 1880), 324 ff; idem, *La Terre Sainte* (Paris, 1882), 355–64; C. R. Conder and H. H. Kitchener, *The Survey of Western Palestine, Memoirs*, Galilee, I (London, 1881), 125–28; Ch. Clermont-Ganneau, *Recueil d'archéologie orientale*, I (Paris, 1888), 241–62; M. van Berchem, "Le château de Bâniâs et ses inscriptions," *JA*, ser. 8, 12 (1888), 440–70; P. Deschamps, *Les châteaux des croisés en Terre Sainte: La défense du Royaume de Jérusalem* (Paris, 1939), 144–74; A. Grabois, "La Cité de Baniyas et le Château de Subeibeh pendant les croisades," *CahCM* 13 (1970), 43–62; M. Benvenisti, *The Crusaders in the Holy Land* (Jerusalem, 1970), 147–57.

[4]The first to point out those dates was Guérin; see V. Guérin, *La Terre Sainte*, 359. Clermont-Ganneau supplied proof of his claim; see Clermont-Ganneau, 256. Among the scholars who accepted those dates were van Berchem, 442; Deschamps, 146–47; J. Sourdel-Thomine, "Baniyas," EI², I, 1017; N. Elisséef, *Nur ad-Din, un grand prince musulman de Syrie au temps des croisades*, I (Damascus, 1967), 271–72.

[5]Grabois, 55 note 36, 59.

[6]Benvenisti, 147.

[7]Ibid., 151. Robinson was in fact the first to doubt the Frankish origin of the fort, considering it to be of Phoenician origin(!); Robinson, 403–4.

[8]Ibn Shaddād, *Al-A'lāq al-Khaṭīra fī Dhikr Umarā' al-Shām wa'l-Jazīra: Ta'rīkh Lubnān, Filasṭīn, wa'l-Urdunn*, ed. S. al-Dahhān (Damascus, 1963), 138–45.

[9]*Assises de la Haute Cour, livre de Jean d'Ibelin*, ed. M. Beugnot, RHC, Lois I, ch. cclxx.421, ch. cclxxi.423.

EXAMINATION OF THE SOURCES

Several paragraphs of Ibn Shaddād's book were quoted by many scholars as a proof for the dating of the fortress to the twelfth century: *"One person mentioned* that al-Ṣubayba was built after . . . the Franks ruled over it in 524 (1129) and they established it . . . *Nothing has come to my knowledge about its beginnings, except what I read in a pleasant historical book written by one of the Banū Munkidh named ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad . . ."* (my emphasis—R.E.).[10]

It would appear at first glance that the credence given to Ibn Shaddād's testimony is justifiable, since his descriptions of Aleppo, his hometown, Damascus, and other sites and fortresses in Palestine included in other volumes of his geo-historical work are very detailed and accurate. But this reference to a member of the Munkidh clan does not necessarily enjoy the reliability and prestige of Ibn Shaddād himself. Furthermore, a new look at Ibn Shaddād's description reveals that he himself was wary of what he had written in this connection. It should be noted that Ibn Shaddād's own reservations about the information contained in ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's book are twofold: first, he states merely that *"one person mentioned"* the information; and, second, he notes that *"nothing has come to my knowledge about its beginnings, except what I read in a pleasant historical book."* It would appear that Ibn Shaddād had searched unsuccessfully for corroboration of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's information. He did not express any similar reservations about other facts which he presents concerning the history of the castle during the thirteenth century.

The second source relied upon for placing the original construction of the fort in the Crusader period is the book written by the Frankish jurist Jean d'Ibelin in the 1260s. In this book, a place called "l'Assebebe" (and in several manuscripts: "la Sebebe") appears twice: once in the list of settlements in which there were courts of burgesses in the twelfth century, and again in the list of settlements which contributed knights to the Frankish army in the twelfth century.[11]

There are many contradictions in these lists. Jean d'Ibelin mentions in one breath fortresses which never existed in the twelfth century (such as the castle of Athlith) and forts that were in the hands of the Crusaders only until 1164 (e.g., Banias). He includes in one feudal unit cities and castles which were not even near to one another. For example, he makes Sebastia, Dor, and Athlith subordinate to the seigniory of Arsuf; Gaza to that of Blanchegard; and Bethlehem, Jericho, and Bet Jiblin to the seigniory of St. Abraham, which is Hebron. Jean Richard, who examined this text, draws our attention to the fact that Jean d'Ibelin, who was one of the leaders of the Palestinian aristocracy, included a great number of knights in the fiefs of the principal barons. In Richard's opinion, Jean d'Ibelin did so with the intention of perpetuating their names and of bringing the number of knights who served under each baron up to one hundred.[12]

The passages dealing with Banias and l'Assebebe create special problems. First, l'Assebebe is not mentioned in all the manuscripts of Jean d'Ibelin's book which are in our possession, and it is not at all clear whether it appears in the original text. Second, even if the Crusaders possessed the castle, there is no doubt that it was not large enough to be able to accommodate a "burgess" court.

Another problem arises from the terminology used by Jean d'Ibelin, who describes l'Assebebe as a town or village (like Belinas, i.e., Banias) and not as a castle (*château*). Yet another difficulty arises from Jean d'Ibelin's exclusive use of the Arabic name for a place ostensibly established by the Franks. Richard attempts to explain away these problems by identifying the town of Ḥatzbaya, 15 km from Banias, with the same Assebebe. In general, it is difficult to extract seeds of reality from the tendentious descriptions of Jean d'Ibelin, who sought to describe in his book an ideal situation which never existed. The lists of knights and of "burgess" courts are compatible with this ideal framework. It is impossible to associate them with any specific dates in the history of the Crusader

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[10] Ibn Shaddād, 139, 141. For ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad, see Ibn Khallikān, *Wafāyāt al-Aʿyān,* ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut, 1972), VII, 12. The first to refer to Ibn Shaddād was Clermont-Ganneau, 254–55.

[11] "La seignorie de l'Assebebe a cort et coins et justice. Et a l'Assebebe a court de borgesie et justice." This paragraph appears only in some of the manuscripts (Jean d'Ibelin, ch. CCLXX.421); "De Belinas et de l'Assebebe et de Chastiau Neuf,

quel service deivent ne sai ge mie la certainete, por ce que il ne furent grant peice a en mains de Crestiens" (ibid., ch. CCLXXI.423).

[12] J. Richard, "Les listes de seigneuries dans le Livre de Jean d'Ibelin, recherches sur l'Assebébe et Mimars," *Revue historique de droit français et étranger,* ser. 4, 32 (1954), 565–72.

kingdom or with some unknown document from the time of the first kingdom, which was ostensibly in Jean d'Ibelin's possession, as some scholars claim. And it is certainly impossible to rely on Jean d'Ibelin for proof of the existence of al-Ṣubayba in the twelfth century.

It is important to note that the only two sources referring to al-Ṣubayba as a twelfth-century Crusader castle were written in the second half of the thirteenth century. There is no source in the twelfth century or in the first quarter of the thirteenth in which the name l'Assebebe or anything similar is mentioned. There is also no Latin or Arabic source which describes the construction of any castle whatsoever in the same area during that period. This is surprising, since al-Ṣubayba is bigger and more impressive than any fort built in the areas controlled by the Crusaders during the twelfth century. Finally, if it were built in the twelfth century by the Crusaders, one would expect that its location—near the border with Damascus—would have demanded some reaction from the Muslim rulers.

The absence of any corroboration from twelfth-century sources of the claims of Ibn Munkidh and Jean d'Ibelin naturally did not go unnoticed by modern historians of the fort, who attempted to explain away this difficulty by claiming that the history of al-Ṣubayba had become inseparably bound up with the history of the town of Banias, so that in some of the sources in which the city of Banias is mentioned, the reference is really to al-Ṣubayba.[13] This contention is based mainly on one line in a text written in the fifteenth century, in which the history of the area in the Mamluk period is described: "As for the city of al-Ṣubayba, known also as Banias, it has a strong fortress."[14] This passage shows that at the time it was written the town of Banias was identified with the castle of al-Ṣubayba and it was not al-Ṣubayba which was identified with the town of Banias. In any event, the text was written in the fifteenth century, at which time, according to all opinions, the magnificent fort at al-Ṣubayba was a living reality, and outshone in the size and splendor of its walls the partially ruined town at the bottom of the slope.

In the following pages I will try to prove that al-Ṣubayba did not exist at all in the twelfth century

and that the interpretation which identifies Banias with al-Ṣubayba is contrived[15] and leads to problems which are very difficult to explain.

BANIAS AND ITS ENVIRONS IN TWELFTH-CENTURY SOURCES

William of Tyre refers several times to events which happened in Banias and the surrounding area. In all his descriptions of these events, which occurred before 1157, there is no mention of a "castle" in the vicinity.[16] This fact is particularly obvious in his description of the conquest of the town in 1140 by a combined Muslim and Crusader army. In addition, in his study of the history of the town from biblical times to his own lifetime, William makes no mention of any fort built by the Crusaders on the adjacent mountain.[17] Also, in his description of the division of the loot taken from the town and its environs, between the leaders of the Crusaders and the rulers in Damascus, there is no hint of the existence of any fort in the environs.

The word "praesidium" appears for the first time in William's description of the Muslim attack on Banias in 1157.[18] From the description of this event there is no doubt that the reference is to a fort which was within the city. William speaks of an unsuccessful attempt on the part of the inhabitants of Banias to stage a sortie against the Muslims who were besieging them. In their retreat, the Crusaders failed to close the gates of the town after them, and the Muslims pursued them into the town. The inhabitants succeeded in making a narrow escape into the fort. It requires a great deal of imagination in order to find in this description a reference to al-Ṣubayba, which is 3 km from the town, above the slope of a steep mountain.[19]

From a very similar description by the contem-

[13]Guérin, 355–61; Clermont-Ganneau, 243; van Berchem, 455–56; Deschamps, 146; Grabois, 59–62.

[14]Khalīl b. Shāhīn al-Ẓāhirī, *Kitāb Zubdat Kashf al-Mamālik*, ed. P. Ravaisse (Paris, 1896), 46–47.

[15]Benvenisti, 147, refers to the reservations of Deschamps and Grabois and challenges the existence of the fort during the Crusader period. See Grabois, 55, 59; Deschamps, 157.

[16]*Willelmi Tyrensis Archiepiscopi Chronicon*, ed. R. B. C. Huygens (Turnholt, 1986), 14, 19, 656–57.

[17]Ibid., 15, 7 684; 9–11, 685–90.

[18]Ibid., 15, 13, 692–93.

[19]Deschamps and Benvenisti were, as I have said, aware of this difficulty; see notes 6 and 16. Grabois tries to overcome it by identifying the town's fortress as "the small fort" mentioned by William's French translator. In fact, "Le petit chastel" here is a translation of the word "praesidium" in the Latin text. There is no diminutive in the Latin text, and there is no reason to suppose that the "small castle" in the French translation refers to a bigger one which existed somewhere. It might simply describe its size. For the translation into Old French, see RHC, HOcc, edition, vol. I, 837, 898.

porary Muslim historian, Ibn al-Qalānisī, it would appear that there was a fort in the town of Banias which the Muslims did not succeed in taking, although they breached its walls.[20]

The mention of a citadel within the town during the siege of 1157, and the absence of any mention of a fort in the description of the town in 1140, might testify to the fact that the citadel was strengthened and enlarged before the Muslim onslaughts in the year 1157. In 1157 the ruler of Banias was forced by financial difficulties to hand over half of the town to the Hospitallers. The sources do not divulge the background to this economic crisis. Nor do they bother to explain why Nūr al-Dīn should have shown so intensive and unprecedented an interest in the town of Banias, to the extent of attacking it twice during the course of one year, in addition to attacking the supply convoy of the Hospitallers on its way to the town.[21] Perhaps the financial difficulties in which the town found itself could have been caused by the immense cost of reconstructing and rebuilding the citadel. These structures changed the town from an unimportant settlement, which the Muslims had ignored on several occasions, to a starting-off point for a swoop on Damascus,[22] and they could also have been the reason for Nūr al-Dīn's special interest in the town.

There is no hint of the existence of a Crusader fortress outside of the town in the description of the second siege by the Muslims[23] and its final conquest.[24]

In all the less detailed references to the town of Banias in Arab sources, I could find no backing for the theory that such a fortress did in fact exist. In short, the suggestion that the "Banias Fortress" of the Crusader period and Qal⁶at al-Ṣubayba are identical does not pass the test of credibility.

Was the fort built at the end of the Zengid pe-

riod or at the beginning of the reign of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, as Benvenisti suggests? Clermont-Ganneau quotes Ibn Shaddād as the sole source for the existence of the fort during Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's reign: "[It] . . . remained in his [al-Ṣāliḥ Ismāᶜīl b. Nūr al-Dīn b. Zangī's] hands until al-Nāṣir Ṣālāḥ al-Dīn took control of it, amongst other things, and gave it to his son, al-Malik al-Afḍal, when he gave him Syria."[25]

Clermont-Ganneau's quotation is abbreviated since, as he himself testifies, the text was not in front of him when he wrote his article. If the text had, in fact, been before him, he would surely have observed that the three dots which separate the previous paragraph (which deals with al-Ṣubayba) and the sentence quoted above (which refers to the transfer of the place to al-Afḍal) indicate the omission of two pages of the original text. Furthermore, the second sentence quoted by Clermont-Ganneau does not refer at all to al-Ṣubayba but to the town of Banias itself.[26]

As there is no other source dating from the end of the twelfth century in which al-Ṣubayba is mentioned, and as a tiresome procession of quotations from sources in which al-Ṣubayba is *not* mentioned would not appear to contribute much toward the furtherance of our study, I shall give only one example in which the absence of any reference to Qalᶜat al-Ṣubayba might be of some importance.

The Spanish Muslim traveler, Ibn Jubayr, went in September 1184 from Damascus to Acre. He described his journey in great detail and was at pains to name all the villages in which he slept. On the third day after his departure from Damascus, he left the village of Bayt Jān for the town of Banias. At noon he reached a large oak tree, and he spent the night at Banias. In his description of Banias and its environs, he mentions also that the town "*is controlled by a fortress which the Franks call Hūnīn*"[27] (my emphasis—R.E.). Hūnīn is the Crusader fortress Castellum Novum whose ruins are to be found on the opposite side of the Jordan Valley! Is it possible that Ibn Jubayr, an observant and generally reliable traveler, would not have noticed the huge, new (according to Benvenisti) castle which straddled his path?

An examination of twelfth-century sources leads inevitably to the conclusion that al-Ṣubayba did not exist at that time, but was built later, during the

[20] Ibn al-Qalānisī, *Dhayl Taʾrīkh Dimashq*, ed. A. F. Amedroz (Leiden, 1908), 339–42. For Eng. translation see F. Gabrieli, *Arab Historians of the Crusades* (London, 1969), 64–68.

[21] *Cartulaire général de l'ordre des Hospitaliers de St.-Jean de Jérusalem (1100–1310)*, ed. J. Delaville Le Roulx, I (Paris, 1894), 195–96, no. 258; William of Tyre, 15, 12, 690–92; J. Riley-Smith, *The Knights of St. John in Jerusalem and Cyprus c. 1050–1310* (London, 1967), 72.

[22] William of Tyre describes only the renovation and rebuilding of Banias which took place after the Muslim attacks in the summer of 1157. William of Tyre, 18, 13, 829.

[23] William of Tyre, 14, 17, 654.

[24] William of Tyre, 19, 10, 876–77; Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fī al-Taʾrīkh*, ed. C. J. Tornberg, XI (Beirut, 1965, reprint of Leiden 1851–76 ed.), 304–5; Abū Shāma, *Kitāb al-Rawḍatayn fī Akhbār al-Dawlatayn*, ed. M. H. M. Aḥmad and M. M. Ziyāda (Cairo, 1958), 139.

[25] Ibn Shaddād, 142.

[26] Ibid., 141, 142.

[27] *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, trans. R. J. C. Broadhurst (London, 1953), 314–16.
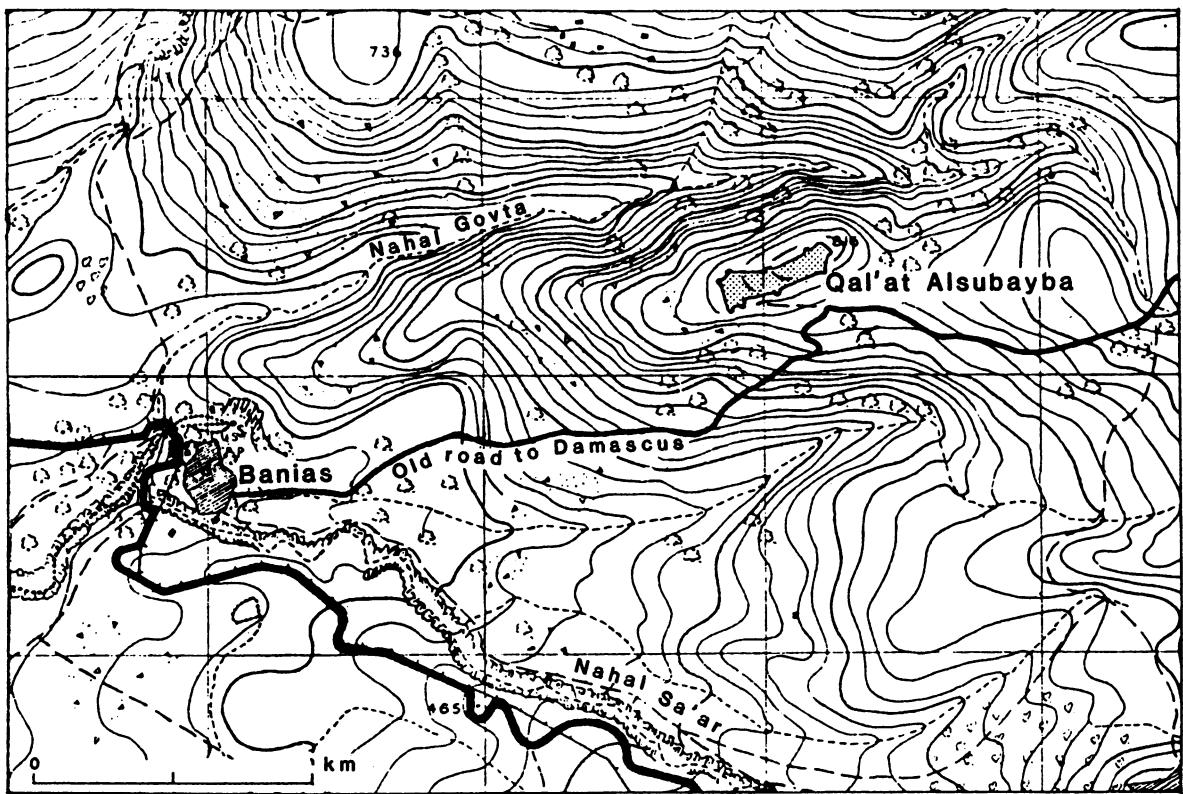
1   Qalʿat al-Ṣubayba, location map
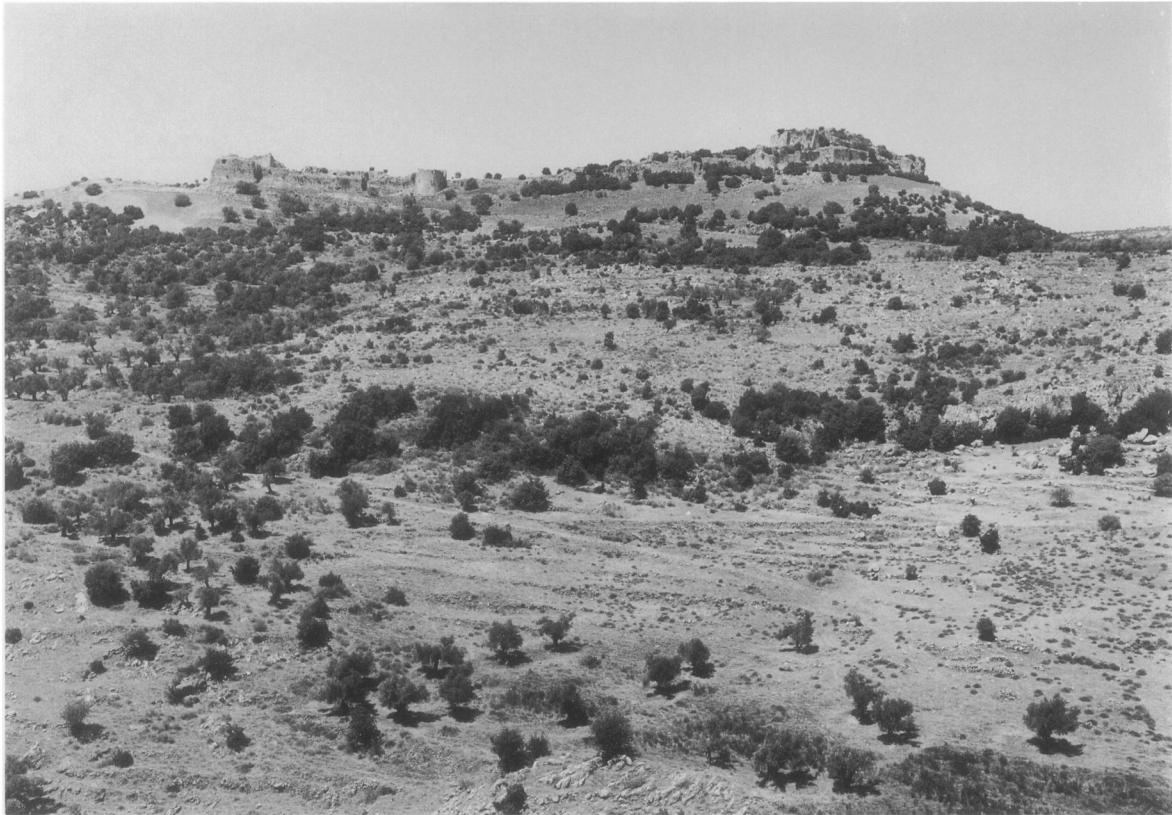
2   Qalʿat al-Ṣubayba, from the south (photo: Z. Radovan)

PLAN OF QAL'AT ALṢUBAYBA

I : al ʿAzīz ʿUthmān 625/1228

gate
gate

II : al ʿAzīz ʿUthmān 627/1230

gate
13
gate
10
6
4
3
gate
8
9

III : Baybars, after 1260

12
IX
15
VIII
II
XI
16
10
V
VII
X
IV
9
8
gate
7
6
VI
5
4
3
gate
2
I
1
III
14
13

Tower 10

Inscription *

0 10 20 30 40 50 m

based on : Paul Deschamps, 1936

T. S.
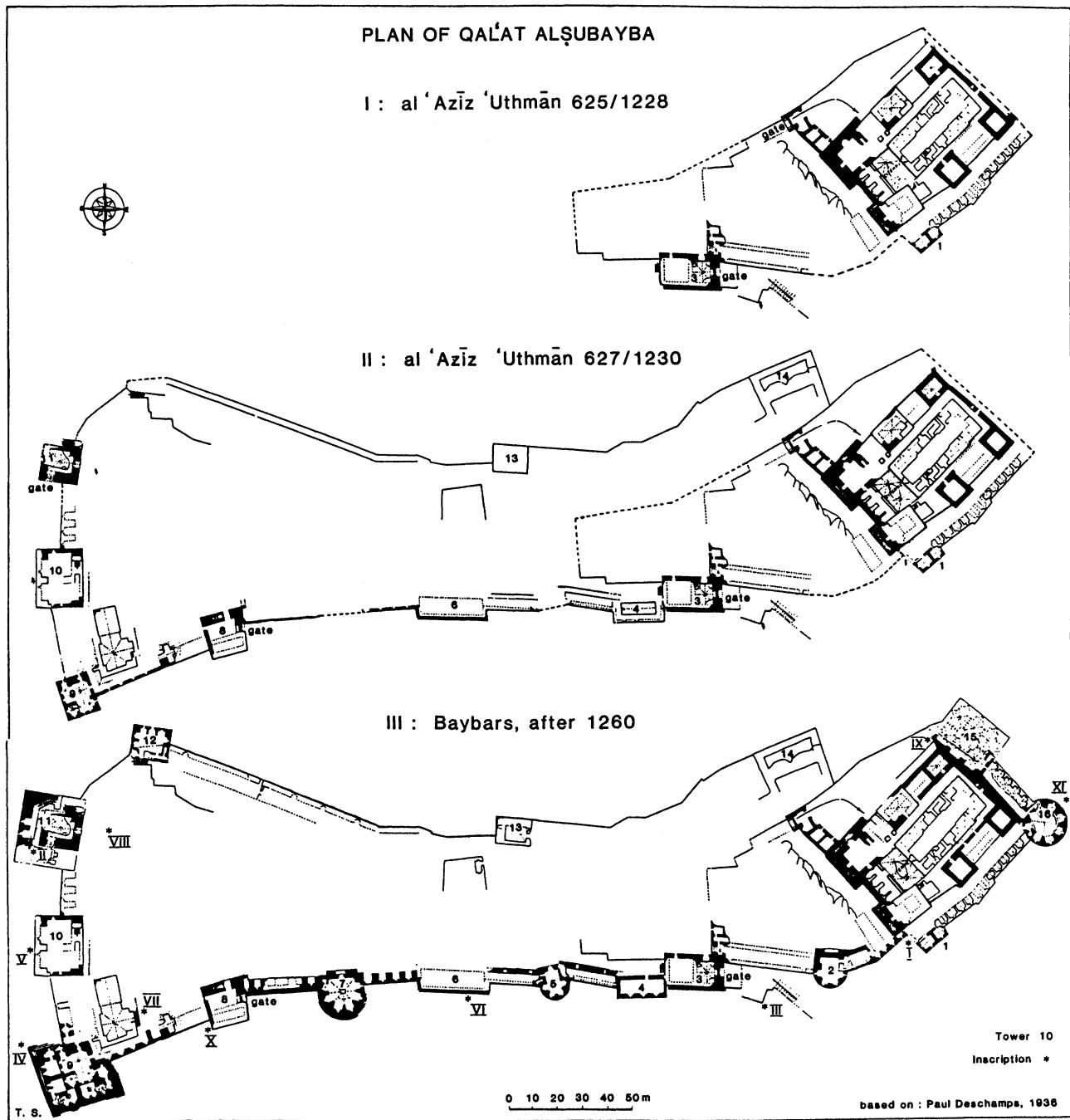
3   Qalʿat al-Ṣubayba, plan (after Paul Deschamps, 1936)

thirteenth century, in an area belonging to the town of Banias. This contention brings us inevitably to a further question, divorced from the problem of dates: if the castle was not built until some time after Ṣalāh al-Dīn's reign, who could have needed so large a fortification and for what purpose was it built? It would appear that the fortress was too large to serve merely as a means of defense for an insignificant town like Banias, which the rulers of Damascus had not hesitated to transfer twice during the twelfth century, once to the Ismāʿīlī sect and once to the Crusaders.

The most logical theory concerning the purpose of the fortress was that propounded by Edward Robinson (even though he, in his exaggerated enthusiasm for the beauty of the place, argued that it had been built already in the time of the Phoenicians and was "patched up"[28] by the Crusaders and Muslims). Robinson rightly points out that the fort which is situated more than two miles from Banias could not have been built for the protection of the place. Most probably it was built in order to protect the great road leading from the Jordan valley to the Damascus Basin.[29]

THE REGION DURING THE EARLY AYYŪBID PERIOD

In the first decades after the death of Ṣalāh al-Dīn, the sources provide no answer to the question of the date of construction of the fort. His death, in 589/1193, led to the beginning of a prolonged struggle, which often developed into open warfare, among his sons, who were his principal heirs. The quarrels among them came to an end only when their uncle, al-Malik al-ʿĀdil, Ṣalāh al-Dīn's brother, succeeded in becoming the paramount prince in the Ayyūbid confederation. Al-ʿĀdil exploited his natural leadership and his manipulative talents to turn from an intermediary between his warring nephews into an active participant, and eventually the holder of the highest office.

Despite frequent references to the town of Banias in descriptions of political infighting which preceded the rise to supremacy of al-ʿĀdil over the Ayyūbid Empire, Qalʿat al-Ṣubayba is not mentioned in any of them.[30] It is not conceivable that the castle could have built during this period,

which was beset with continuous bitter fighting over the regime in Damascus. In all these struggles, the warring brothers were careful to preserve the military status quo. The construction of so large a fort by any one of them, or by one of their allies, would have inevitably led to a bitter military confrontation with the others. There is also no indication of the existence of the fort or of any increased military importance of the Banias region that would have resulted from the construction of a large fortress. Such a fortress could not but have played an important role during the many military campaigns waged by the members of the Ayyūbid family.

There is also no sign of any increase in the importance of Banias during the first two decades of the thirteenth century. The region is mentioned in 597/1201 when the town itself was struck by an earthquake.[31] It is mentioned again when it was transferred to Fakhr al-Dīn Jahārkas, an important emir, who then bequeathed the town to his infant son, whose name is unknown to us. The inheritance was administered by a guardian until the young boy died in 615/1218, without leaving any heirs. Also at that time, there is no sign of any increase in the importance of the region, which was handed over to the control of one of Sultan al-ʿĀdil's young sons, al-ʿAzīz ʿUthmān, who had not previously distinguished himself and who still had a long way to go before playing an active role in Ayyūbid politics.[32]

During the course of the Fifth Crusade, the Banias region features militarily, but once again there is no mention of Qalʿat al-Ṣubayba—despite the fact that the town of Banias itself was surrounded and plundered by the Crusaders in their first foray in the north.[33] In March 615/1219, when the Crusaders were on the point of conquering

[28] "[The Crusaders and the Moslems] did nothing in the citadel but patch up a few portions of it"; Robinson, 403.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Concerning the concession of Banias to al-Afḍal, see Ibn Shaddād, 142; for its concession to Ḥusām al-Dīn Bishāra, see Ibn al-Athīr, al-Kāmil, XII, 160; Ibn al-ʿAdīm, Zubdat al-Ḥalab min Taʾrīkh Ḥalab, ed. S. al-Dahhān, III (Damascus, 1968), 89;

for the disposal of Ḥusām al-Dīn Bishāra from his iqtāʿ and for the concession of this iqtāʿ to Fakhr al-Dīn Jahārkas and the siege which followed it, see Ibn Wāṣil, Mufarrij al-Kurūb fī Akhbār Banī Ayyūb, ed. G. Shayyāl, S. ʿĀshur, and H. Rabīʿ, III (Cairo 1953–), 117; Ibn al-Athīr, al-Kāmil, XII, 160; for the final conquest of the city by Jahārkas, see Ibn al-Athīr, al-Kāmil, XII, 163; Ibn Wāṣil, III, 129–33; Ibn al-ʿAdīm, III, 152–53; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, Mirʾat al-Zamān fī Taʾrīkh al-Aʿyān, facs. ed. by J. R. Jewett (Chicago, 1907), 309–11.

[31] Ibn al-Jawzī, ed. Jewett, 308, 331.

[32] Ibn al-Jawzī, ed. Jewett, 364–65; G. Wiet, J. Sauvaget, and E. Combe, Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe, X, 63–64, nos. 3687–89.

[33] This plundering is described only in Arab sources; see Ibn al-Athīr, al-Kāmil, XII, 321; Ibn al-Jawzī, ed. Jewett, 382–83; R. S. Humphreys, From Saladin to the Mongols (Albany, N.Y., 1977), 156–57, explains why al-Ṣubayba is not mentioned by

Damietta, al-Muʿaẓẓam ʿĪsā, al-ʿĀdil's son and governor in Syria, destroyed all the fortifications in western Palestine, including those of the town of Banias.[34] Once again, it is the town of Banias which is mentioned in the sources and not Qalʿat al-Ṣubayba.

I do not think there is any likelihood that a new fort could have been built in Palestine before the summer of 618/1221, when the Crusaders were thrown out of Damietta. Only then, after having been saved from the threat of the conquest of Egypt, could the Ayyūbids have been free to erect new fortifications in Palestine and Syria. This hypothesis is consistent with the sources in our possession, which indicated that al-Ṣubayba was built in the 1220s.

QALʿAT AL-ṢUBAYBA IN THE ARABIC SOURCES

Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī (d. 654/1256) writes that "[al-ʿAzīz ʿUthmān] was the ruler of Banias . . . and he built al-Ṣubayba."[35] Al-ʿAzīz ʿUthmān, one of the younger sons of al-ʿĀdil, was the ruler of the Banias region after 615/1218 and before his death in 630/1232. Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī, who was al-ʿAzīz's contemporary, used in his description the verb banā.[36] Evidently, this information was cited by al-Nuwayrī (d. 732/1331–2) in his monumental encyclopedic work.[37]

Ibn Shaddād, who refers to a theory that al-Ṣubayba was built by the Crusaders, begins his detailed history of the fort with the reign of al-ʿAzīz ʿUthmān.[38] Only the few sentences quoted before are devoted to the earlier period.

The first Latin source in which al-Ṣubayba is mentioned is that of Benoît d'Alignan, the archbishop of Marseilles. This was written in 1238 and contains the following sentence: "He meticulously

explored the country in the vicinity of Safed and found no fort other than Subebea [sic], which was under the rule of the Sultan's mentioned grandson."[39]

The categorical testimonies of Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī and al-Nuwayrī, the description of Benoît, and the implied testimony of Ibn Shaddād add strength to the theory that Qalʿat al-Ṣubayba was in fact built in the 1220s by the ruler of Banias, al-ʿAzīz ʿUthmān. This is further strengthened by valuable information contained in inscriptions found in the castle itself.

INSCRIPTIONS IN THE CASTLE

To date, eleven inscriptions have been discovered in Qalʿat al-Ṣubayba, seven of them by the present writer. For the texts and translations of these, see the article by R. Amitai (this volume).

The following is a summary of the dates and names of the local rulers contained in the inscriptions:

Inscription No. I mentions al-ʿAzīz ʿUthmān. The year: 625/1227–8.

Inscriptions II–VI also mention al-ʿAzīz. The year: 627/1230 (in some of these inscriptions—nos. III, V, VI—the name and/or date are missing, but their extant texts are virtually identical with the more complete Nos. II and IV).

Inscription No. VII mentions al-Saʿīd Ḥasan b. al-ʿAzīz ʿUthmān. The year: 637/1239–40.

Inscription VIII has the name of Sultan Baybars, but no date; inscriptions IX–XI do not contain any name or date, but from the style of the writing they would seem to date from the early Mamluk period, and probably derive from the reconstruction work carried out by Sultan Baybars.

Inscription No. I is the oldest. It was found and published by van Berchem in 1888,[40] and it might be the foundation inscription of the fort. This conclusion is based both on the fact that this was the first inscription and also on its content.[41] This is the only inscription which refers expressly to the construction of the castle and not to the renovation

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saying "The Baniyas garrison, housed in the Citadel of al-Ṣubayba, apparently did not intervene, for we read of no resistance to the Franks during the three days which they spent pillaging the town."

[34] Ibn al-Jawzī, ed. Jewett, 392–93.

[35] Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī, Miʾrat al-Zamān, VIII (Hyderabad, 1951), 678.

[36] See R. Amitai, "Notes on the Ayyūbid Inscriptions at al-Ṣubayba" (this volume), note 20.

[37] Quatremère was the first to refer to this text, among other sources concerning the history of the fort quoted by him. The scholars who studied the history of the place did not pay enough attention to Nuwayrī's testimony. See Makrizi, Histoire des sultans mamlouks, ed. M. Quatremère, I, 1 (Paris, 1837), 9 note 8; al-Nuwayrī, Nihāyat al-Arab fī Funūn al-Adab, MS. Leiden Ar. 2M (= vol. xxviii, fol. 43v (s.a. 630).

[38] Ibn Shaddād, 142 ff.

[39] "Diligenter consideravit terram usque Saphet et non vidit munitionem alique praeter Subebeam, quam tenebat nepos dicti Soldani"; R. B. C. Huygens, "Un nouveau texte du traité 'De constructione castri Saphet'," SM 3rd. ser., 6 (1965), 379, lines 37–39.

[40] Van Berchem, 463–64.

[41] Anshaʾa (verbal noun inshāʾ) means "to build," "to construct," usually from scratch.

of an existing structure. The structure itself is called *bāshūra,* which can be translated as a bastion or a barbican.[42] The builder of the castle, according to this inscription, is no other than al-'Azīz 'Uthmān.

The next five inscriptions (II–VI) also carry the name of al-'Azīz 'Uthmān, and they all have similar texts. Of these five, only No. II was published by van Berchem.[43] The other four, which are here produced for the first time, contain identical texts (although some of them are only fragments). The fortification mentioned in them is no longer a *bāshūra,* but a *thaghr,* that is, a border fort. Here there is a description of the expansion of the castle. The verb used in this inscriptions means to widen, expand, repair, or renovate, as van Berchem rightly pointed out.[44] These five inscriptions, in my opinion, describe repairs made to the fort in 627/1230, in the course of which the original castle was reconstructed and in the process transformed from a modest outpost into a large border fort.

THE REASONS FOR BUILDING QAL'AT AL-ṢUBAYBA

The solution of the question of when the castle was constructed does not give any acceptable answer to the problem of why it was erected. On the contrary, it adds to the difficulty posed above.

Al-Malik al-'Azīz 'Uthmān was one of the less prominent brothers among the Ayyūbid family. The appanage left to him, Banias, was a secondary one, and it is doubtful whether the proceeds therefrom were sufficient to finance so large a building project as Qal'at al-Ṣubayba. It would appear that for such an undertaking al-'Azīz 'Uthmān would have required pecuniary assistance from the court in Damascus. Why, then, should he have sought such assistance? And what possible explanation could there be for the fact that the name of the sultan does not appear in the construction or the restoration inscriptions? The explanation for these difficulties lies, in my opinion, in the events which occurred in the Ayyūbid Empire immediately prior to the construction of Qal'at al-Ṣubayba.

The year 624/1227 found the empire divided by one of the typical disputes which characterized the post al-'Ādil period. Al-Kāmil Muḥammad, the ruler of Egypt, inherited the title of sultan from his father, and enjoyed the loyalty of his brother, al-Ashraf Mūsā, the ruler of the northern regions

beyond the Euphrates (the Jazīra). On the other hand, al-Mu'aẓẓam 'Īsā, while observing all the formalities connected with the recognition of his brother's status as sultan (including mention of his name in the *khuṭba,* the Friday sermon), conducted independent military activities, aimed apparently at increasing his autonomy in the region of Syria and Palestine. Already in 622/1225, al-Mu'aẓẓam made a treaty with the leader of the Khwārizmians. This treaty resulted in a series of hostile actions aimed mainly at the territories inherited by al-Ashraf, who, as noted above, was a loyal ally of al-Kāmil.[45]

If al-Mu'aẓẓam had in fact intended to lessen the influence of al-Kāmil in the northern regions of the empire, then he apparently was successful in his efforts. For the coalition formed among his forces, those of the Khwārizmians, and those of several local rulers succeeded in both diminishing the scope of al-Ashraf's rule and preventing him from intervening effectively in the power struggle between his elder brothers.

Al-Kāmil did not accept al-Mu'aẓẓam's growing strength quietly, but searched for an ally. He approached Emperor Frederick II and suggested that they form a German-Egyptian alliance with the aim of opposing his brother and his allies. In return for this alliance, al-Kāmil was prepared to give Jerusalem to the German ruler.[46] The emperor sent a deputation to Egypt in order to work out details of the alliance. Al-Kāmil, as sultan of the empire, could offer Jerusalem to the emperor, but the city was in fact within the area belonging to al-Mu'aẓẓam. The latter not only objected to the terms of the treaty, but reacted sharply to the alliance about to be concluded by his brother. He was prepared to go to war even against the German emperor if necessary, and this message was passed on to the emperor's emissaries who visited him at the end of the summer of 624/1227.[47]

The threat of a mass crusade led by Emperor Frederick II hung over the Levant for many years. But as long as this was merely a threat, the exact

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[42] See Amitai, note 9.
[43] Van Berchem, 457–58.
[44] Ibid., 458.

[45] H. A. R. Gibb, "The Aiyubids" in K. M. Setton, gen. ed., *A History of the Crusades,* II, *The Later Crusades, 1189–1311,* R. L. Wolff and H. W. Hazard, eds., 701; Humphreys, 179–85.
[46] S. Runciman, *A History of the Crusades,* III (London, 1978), 184–85; T. C. Van Cleve, "The Crusade of Frederick II," in Setton, II, 435; H. L. Gottschalk, *Al-Malik al-Kāmil und seine Zeit* (Wiesbaden, 1958), 141–42. Gottschalk considered al-Kāmil's proposals came to divert the Crusaders' aggressiveness from Egypt. The war with al-Mu'aẓẓam was secondary.
[47] E. Blochet, "Relation diplomatique des Hohenstaufen avec les Sultans d'Egypte," *RH* 80 (1902), 53 ff.

date of whose implementation was cloaked in obscurity, al-Muʿaẓẓam could afford to ignore it, and it can be assumed that this was in fact on his mind when he dismissed the emperor's emissaries in the summer of 624/1227. But in the autumn of that same year, al-Muʿaẓẓam may have come to the conclusion that his calculations were ill-founded, because at the end of Shawwal 624/October 1227 a German advance force arrived in Palestine and the threatened crusade became an imminent reality. This German advance force, although part of it left almost immediately after its arrival,[48] began feverish preparations for the approaching war, which consisted mainly of the repair and restoration of existing fortresses. At that time, the refortification of Caesarea and Sidon, the erection of the large Teutonic fort of Montfort, and preparations for the fortification of Jaffa were begun.[49]

Al-Muʿaẓẓam, for his part, apparently completed the destruction of the fortresses of west Palestine which he had already started during the Fifth Crusade.[50] It would appear that al-Muʿaẓẓam did not confine himself only to a scorched earth policy in his defensive actions against the emperor's army. His sharp verbal reaction exposed him to the danger of attack against Damascus, especially since the forts of Palestine had been destroyed (and in any case they were too far from the centers of his own forces). In fact, the whole area between Acre and Damascus had remained without any real means of defense. It would seem, then, that al-Muʿaẓẓam, like the Crusaders on the coast, also began to fortify the borders of the area under his control.

This, in my opinion, was the reason for the construction of the original fortification at al-Ṣubayba. The building inscription testifies to the fact that the first stage of construction was completed in 625/1228. And as the fort had to be built in a great hurry, the method of construction employed was a most economical and speedy one.

Al-Muʿaẓẓam chose the site for the construction of the castle's first stage, intended to protect Damascus, very carefully. The site chosen is at the top of the steepest slope of a mountain perched above the principal trade route between the Huleh Valley

and Damascus.[51] The job of constructing the fort was entrusted to al-ʿAzīz ʿUthmān, as it was built in the area bequeathed to him. There is no doubt, however, that al-Muʿaẓẓam helped his brother with the necessary finances and manpower for completing the construction in the shortest possible time. Al-Muʿaẓẓam, however, did not live to see the completion of Qalʿat al-Ṣubayba, because he died in Dhū l-Qaʿda 624/November 1227 from a bout of dysentery.[52]

The first stage of construction of Qalʿat al-Ṣubayba was completed within a year.[53] The building inscription makes mention only of al-ʿAzīz ʿUthmān, who was, after his brother's death, one of the leaders of the Damascus coalition. Al-Muʿaẓẓam's heir was too weak and could not insist on due honor being paid to him in the building inscription.

The death of al-Muʿaẓẓam enabled al-Kāmil to honor the treaty with Frederick II without becoming embroiled in war. He transferred Jerusalem, which had previously been in the hands of his brother, to Frederick II without any active opposition, since the Ayyūbid family was divested of its militant element with the death of al-Muʿaẓẓam. The transfer of Jerusalem to Frederick II removed the peril threatening Syria and Palestine. Before the passage of a year, Frederick II left the country (1229), never to return. Al-Kāmil had last achieved real political paramountcy through his alliance with his younger brother al-Ashraf and his conquest of Damascus from al-Muʿaẓẓam's son. After the departure of Frederick II, al-ʿAzīz ʿUthmān, who had joined al-Kāmil after al-Muʿaẓẓam's death, was able to devote his time to the completion and extension of the new castle of al-Ṣubayba, the extension including the western part of the fort. He turned it into one of the biggest fortresses in the whole of the Levant, thereby strengthening his political and military position.

FIRST STAGES OF CONSTRUCTION OF QALʿAT AL-ṢUBAYBA

It is difficult to distinguish between the first two stages of construction as the same method of building was used in both. This was a very eco-

[48] Matthaeus Parisiensis, *Chronica maiora*, ed. H. R. Luard (Rolls Series, LVII), III (London, 1872–84), 128 ff.

[49] *Chronique d'Ernoul et de Bernard le Trésorier*, ed. L. de Mas Latrie (Paris, 1871), 459; R. Grousset, *Histoire des croisades et du royaume franc de Jérusalem*, III (Paris, 1936), 288.

[50] Gibb, 701.

[51] This route was studied among other ancient roads during the preparation of this paper.

[52] Humphreys, 184.

[53] A year is not too short a period of time for the construction of a fort. A fort of similar size, Chastellet, was constructed, not far from al-Ṣubayba, in the 1170s in less then nine months. Wil-

nomical and speedy method, used for fortifications in the rural areas of Palestine in the twelfth century. Unlike other Ayyūbid castles (Tabor, 'Ajlun, etc.), not all the stones were perfectly masoned. The vaults were very simple, and almost no ornamentation was used.[54] Only a very careful examination of the plan of the castle drawn by Deschamps and aerial photographs taken before 1967 (after 1967 grazing was halted in the area of the castle, and the surroundings became covered with dense foliage) and of the inscriptions makes it possible to distinguish reliably among the various stages of construction. Final positive identification will be possible only through extensive archaeological excavation.

QAL'AT AL-ṢUBAYBA: STAGE 1

The oldest inscription can be found on the first tower, which is attached to the wall of the Donjon. The Donjon's wall is, therefore, part of the fortress' first stage. In the northwest corner is the entrance gate (internal gate in the plan of the fortress; see Fig. 3). From the corner of the gate stretches a wall which can be very clearly identified in the aerial photograph. The wall faces west southwest, and is joined by an additional segment of wall. Both remains are partially destroyed. They create a triangular courtyard. Graboïs,[55] who followed Deschamps by ascribing this to an early stage of construction, attributed it to the Crusaders. It would appear to me that the Donjon, the moat, the triangular courtyard, and the bāshūra are no more nor less than the first stage erected by al-'Azīz 'Uthmān in 625/1228.

QAL'AT AL-ṢUBAYBA: STAGE 2

In 1230 al-'Azīz 'Uthmān completed the renovation of the fortress. Its area was considerably increased, and included the whole west side with its three ancient towers. In each of these towers there was an inscription commemorating the restoration work of al-'Azīz 'Uthmān. Two of these inscriptions may still be found at their original site: one is

on tower 10 (inscription No. V), and the second on tower 11 (inscription No. II). Three other inscriptions were found on the ground (inscriptions Nos. III, IV, and VI). These inscriptions were displaced either during the destruction wrought during the Mongol occupation of the castle in 1260 or in the course of the subsequent repairs and extensions carried out during the third stage (see below). Two gates were added to the castle: the southern gate (in tower 11) and western gate (in tower 8).

In executing the repairs, al-'Azīz's builders used the same economical method of construction which characterized the first stage. The identification of this stage, however, follows first and foremost from an examination of the castle's plan and from the content and position of the various inscriptions (see stage 2 on the plan of the castle).

QAL'AT AL-ṢUBAYBA: STAGE 3

The history of Qal'at al-Ṣubayba at the end of the Ayyūbid period and during the reign of the Mamluks falls outside the scope of this study. But since during the 1260s far-reaching changes were made in the fort, which gave it its present appearance, it seemed worthwhile to survey in brief these changes and the reasons for them.

The Mongol invasion of Syria and Palestine caused great damage, to both Qal'at al-Ṣubayba and other Ayyūbid fortresses. According to Abū Shama (665/1266–7), in Shāma II 658/June–July 1260 reports reached Damascus about the razing of al-Ṣalt, 'Ajlūn, Ṣalkhad, Boṣra, and al-Ṣubayba fortresses.[56] Afterward, the area was reconquered by the Mamluks, and under Sultan Baybars the walls of al-Ṣubayba were restored and renovated.[57]

Evidence of Baybars' undertaking may be found in the monumental engraved inscription in the castle, located in the courtyard near the entrance to tower 11. The inscription, which bears the name of Baybars, was deciphered by van Berchem.[58] Baybars' improvements were very widespread, and included the construction of six new towers and the widening of two existing towers in the front western wall.

The improvements made by Baybars were exceptional because of their sophisticated and care-

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liam of Tyre, 21, 25 (26), 997, tells us about the beginning of the erection of the castle in October 1178, and about its destruction after a siege in August 1179; ibid., 21, 29 (30), 1003–4.

[54] For a discussion of building techniques used in 12th- and 13th-century rural Palestine, see R. Ellenblum, "Construction Methods in Frankish Rural Settlements," in B. Z. Kedar, ed., *Horns of Hattin*, in press.

[55] Graboïs, 60.

[56] Abū Shāma, 206; al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl Mirʾat al-Zamān*, I (Hyderabad, 1954–61), 358. It seems that al-Yūnīnī quotes Abū Shāma.

[57] Al-Yūnīnī, III, 259–60 (undated in Baybars' obituary).

[58] Van Berchem, 458.

ful execution, not found in any other fortress in Palestine. The main sophistication lies in the domed roofs of the towers, constructed of square layers of stones, whereas domes of that period were usually constructed with a series of circular layers decreasing in circumference. In all the octagonal towers, the roof rests on a central pillar, which makes the construction even more complicated. The finish in Baybars' construction is complete. A great deal of attention was devoted to the excellent plasterwork between the layers of stone. The builders took the trouble to give the plaster a special design which makes the identification of this stage of construction all the simpler. I have not come across this system of building in any Crusader or Ayyūbid fortress in Palestine, and its origin requires wide and detailed research.

SUMMARY

The history of the first stages of construction of Qalʿat al-Ṣubayba were examined anew, on the basis of several methods of approach including: a new study of the Latin and Arabic sources; a geographic-historical survey of the road system around the fort; examination of aerial photographs of the castle; a reexamination of the plan of the fort as published by Deschamps; and a care-ful examination of the castle, including accurate siting of the inscriptions contained therein, and identification of the methods of building which characterize each of the stages of construction.

All the sources strengthen the assumption that Qalʿat al-Ṣubayba was first built, at the initiative of the Ayyūbid ruler of Damascus, by the ruler of Banias, al-ʿAzīz ʿUthmān, in the year 625/1228. The fort was built within the framework of the Syrian Ayyūbid strategy formulated already during the Fifth Crusade, the main points of which were the destruction and desertion of the forts in western Palestine and the construction of an alternative defense line to Damascus on the western slopes of the Golan Heights. Qalʿat al-Ṣubayba is symbolic of this strategy, and it was built in great haste on the eve of the crusade of Frederick II. After the departure of Frederick II in 1229, al-ʿAzīz ʿUthmān was able to complete the fortification at his leisure, and then he finished the side which faces Banias. The Ayyūbid strategy was continued by Baybars, who destroyed the forts on the Palestinian coast, but invested considerable effort in fortifying Qalʿat al-Ṣubayba (and other inland forts), giving it its present appearance.

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